MASTERPIECES OF ANCIENT COINAGE

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MASTERPIECES OF ANCIENT COINAGE

The Coinage of Sicily in the Fifth Century B.C.

The silver tetradrachms struck at the Greek settlements in Sicily in the fifth century B.C. rank as the finest examples of classical Greek art to be found on coins, and are indeed outstanding and important works of art in their own right. They portray the favorite images of the Greeks — gods and goddesses, satyrs, nymphs, and river gods, horses, dolphins, and lions — often in a style that rivals the finest contemporary marble sculpture or vase painting. They also reflect the cultural level achieved by these prosperous Sicilian cities, which often acted as patrons for many great artists and poets.

The first decades of the fifth century saw several tyrants ruling the major cities. Theron ruled at Agrigentum from 488-472 B.C. Anaxilas (494-476 B.C.) ruled at Messana and across the straits in Southern Italy at Rhegium. Gelon was tyrant of Gela from 491 B.C. but soon also controlled Catana, Naxos, Leontini, and Syracuse, moving his capital to Syracuse in 485 B.C. He was succeeded by his brother Hieron (ruled 478-467 B.C.), who was a powerful ruler but also a great patron of the arts. Many of the great poets and philosophers visited his court at Syracuse, including Aeschylus, Bacchylides, Simonides, and Pindar, who wrote of Hieron's victories at the Olympic and Delphic Games. However, by 461 B.C. following the expulsion of Hieron's successor Thrasybulus from Syracuse and of the sons of the tyrant Anaxilas from Messana, most Sicilian cities had established democracies, which would last throughout the fifth century until the Carthaginian invasions.

The following group of coins offered for sale by Bowers & Ruddy Galleries dates primarily from the early fifth century, from the time of the tyrants to the restoration of the democracies. It is during this period that the finest masterpieces were created, and this group includes several of the rarest and most important, including the spectacular tetradrachm from Naxos, the very rare Leontini tetradrachm by the Demareteion artist, and a previously unpublished tetradrachm from Catana, as well as a series of tetradrachms from Syracuse.

CATANA

1. Silver tetradrachm (17.09 grams) ca. 460 B.C.
Obv. Bearded, man-headed bull (the river god Amenanus) kneeling right, palmette and floral pattern in exergue.
Rev. Nike walking left, holding fillet and wreath, H to left, KAT-AN-AION around.

Bibliography: R.S. Poole, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum: Sicily* (London, 1876), p. 42, no. 5 (obv.).
G.M. Columba, "Il ripostiglio di Ognina," *Atti e memorie dell'istituto Italiano di numismatica* 5 (Rome, 1925), pl. I, 5 (obv.)
C. Boehringer, "Rekonstruktion des Schatzfundes von Ognina 1923," *Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau* 57 (1978). p. 117 and pl. 30, 82-83.
W. Schwabacher, "Zu den Muenzen von Katana," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archaeologischen Instituts. Roemische Abteilung* 48 (1933), pl 121-126.
Reverse die unpublished.

Catana was founded in the eighth century B.C. by colonists from nearby Naxos. In 476 B.C., the tyrant Hieron of Syracuse expelled the inhabitants of Catana and Naxos, transferred them to Leontini, and repopulated Catana with his own colonists, renaming the city Aetna. After the fall of the tyrants, around 461 B.C., the first inhabitants returned and restored the original name.

This tetradrachm belongs to the first regular series of coins struck at Catana, soon after the return of the original inhabitants in 461 B.C. The obverses portray the local river god Amenanus shown as a man-headed bull, and the reverses show a winged Nike in fine style. This issue was short lived, lasting only about ten years, and was replaced ca. 450 B.C. by the extensive series showing a quadriga on the obverse and a head of Apollo on the reverse. Tetradrachms like the above of the earlier series are extremely rare.

2. Silver tetradrachm (17.25 grams) ca. 465 B.C.
Obv. Charioteer driving quadriga right, Nike flying left above crowning driver, lion running right in exergue.
Rev. Head of Apollo right wearing laurel wreath, running lion below, three laurel leaves and ΛEONTI-NO-N (retrograde) around.

Bibliography: Sylloge Numorum Graecorum: The Collection of the American Numismatic Society, Part 4 (New York, 1977), no. 218 (same dies).
G. E. Rizzo, *Monete greche della Sicilia antica* (Rome, 1946), pl. 22, 14 (obv.) and pl. 22, 5 (rev).
C. M. Kraay and M. Hirmer, *Greek Coins* (New York, 1966). pl. 6, 19 (obv.) and 18 (rev.).
R. Ross Holloway, "Demarete's Lion," *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 11 (1964), p. 6-11.

After 465 B.C., Leontini changed its coin types, replacing the quadriga/lion's head tetradrachms with an Apollo head/lion's head type. But first, two sets of dies were engraved that had a quadriga obverse and the earliest Apollo head as a reverse. The coins are of exceptionally fine style and in fact remarkably close in style to the famous contemporary decadrachm from Syracuse known as the Demareteion. The similarities are especially notable in the facial features and treatment of the hair of Apollo and in the small running lion present on both sides of the tetradrachm and on the Demareteion. This has led many to believe that the coins are by the same artist, often called the Demareteion master, who was commissioned by both cities to engrave dies for a special occasion.

MESSANA

3. Silver tetradrachm (17.27 grams) ca. 480-460 B.C.
Obv. Bearded charioteer driving biga of mules right, laurel leaf in exergue.
Rev. Hare running right, ME ϟϟ E-N-ION around.

Bibliography: cf. *Sylloge Numorum Graecorum: The Collection of the American Numismatic Society, Part 4* (New York, 1977), nos. 314-320.

Around 480 B.C. Anaxilas, tyrant of Messana and Rhegium, introduced a new series of tetradrachms that show a mule biga on the obverse and a hare on the reverse. Aristotle explains the obverse as commemorating Anaxilas' Olympic victory in the mule car race, either in 484 or 480 B.C. The mule car and hare remained on the tetradrachms of Messana until the beginning of the fourth century B.C. The above specimen is from the earliest period and is in exceptionally fine early classical style, struck in high relief.

4. Silver tetradrachm (17.31 grams) ca. 460 B.C.
Obv. Bearded head of Dionysus right, crowned with ivy wreath.
Rev. Bearded, ithyphallic Silenus with animal ears and tail squatting, holding cantharus in right hand, N-AXI-ON around.

Bibliography: H. A. Cahn, *Die Muenzen der sizilischen Stadt Naxos* (Basel, 1944), no. 54.
G. E. Rizzo, *Monete greche della Sicilia antica* (Rome, 1946), pl 28, 12.
C. M. Kraay and M. Hirmer, *Greek Coins* (New York, 1966), pl. 6, 19 (obv.) and 18 (rev.).

Like the inhabitants of Catana, the original population of Naxos, which had been removed to Leontini by Hieron, returned to their city in 461 B.C. Apparently to commemorate their return, they struck this extraordinary tetradrachm, a masterpiece that ranks as perhaps the finest of all Greek coins. Only one obverse and one reverse die were engraved, and each is of exquisitely fine work. The obverse portrays a finely detailed head of Dionysus, and the reverse masterfully depicts a drunken Silenus in full frontal view with skillful foreshortening. It is undoubtedly the work of a master artist commissioned for a special purpose.

5. Silver tetradrachm (17.20 grams) ca. 500 B.C.
Obv. Charioteer driving quadriga right, ϟVRAΦO/ ϟION above.
Rev. Quadripartite incuse in center of which is circular incuse containing head of Arethusa left.

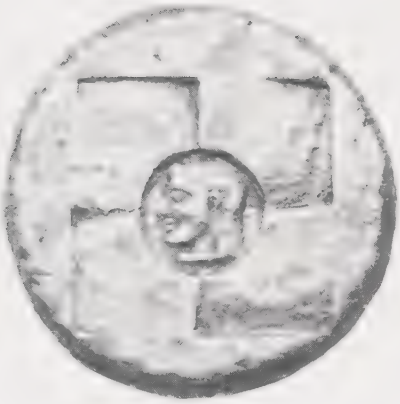
Bibliography: E. Boehringer, *Die Muenzen von Syrakus* (Berlin, 1929), no. 16 (V 12/R 9E).

The earliest coins of Syracuse, first struck at the end of the sixth century B.C., were silver tetradrachms of archaic style. On these early coins, the head of the water nymph Arethusa occurs for the first time in a small incuse. Later, the incuse would be discontinued and Arethusa would be shown surrounded by swimming dolphins, a theme continued into the fourth century with Arethusa's appearance changing with the changing styles.

6. Silver tetradrachm (17.09 grams) ca. 475 B.C.
Obv. Charioteer driving quadriga right, Nike flying right above crowning horses.
Rev. Head of Arethusa right, wearing diadem and necklace, four dolphins and ΣVRAKOΣION around.

Bibliography: E. Boehringer, *Die Muenzen von Syrakus* (Berlin, 1929), no. 148 (V 65/ R 102).

On this and the following three coins, Arethusa becomes the central reverse figure, here represented in good late archaic style. The coin dates from the rule of the tyrant Hieron.



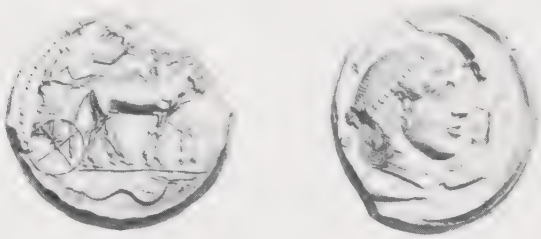
7. Silver tetradrachm (17.46 grams) ca. 465 B.C.
Obv. Charioteer driving quadriga right, Nike flying left above crowning driver, sea serpent in exergue.
Rev. Head of Arethusa right, wearing diadem, earrings and necklace, four dolphins and ΣVR-A-ΚΟΣΙΟΝ (partly retrograde) around.

Bibliography: E. Boehringer, *Die Muenzen von Syrakus* (Berlin, 1929), no. 433 (V 232/ R 311).

This exceptionally fine tetradrachm is very close in style to the Demareteion decadrachm of about the same date. The head of Arethusa is especially influenced by the decadrachm, although the obverse quadriga has its own lovely style, especially notable in the treatment of the horses' heads and the fine detail of the driver.

8. Silver tetradrachm (17.20 grams) ca. 460-455 B.C.
Obv. Charioteer driving quadriga right, Nike flying right above, crowning horses, sea serpent in exergue.
Rev. Head of Arethusa right wearing diadem, earring and necklace, four dolphins and Σ-Υ-RAKOΣION around.

Bibliography: E.Boehringer, *Die Muenzen von Syrakus* (Berlin, 1929), no. 469 (V 252/ R 338).



9. Silver tetradrachm (17.48 grams) ca. 460-455 B.C.
Obv. Charioteer driving quadriga right, Nike flying right above, crowning horses, sea serpent in exergue.
Rev. Head of Arethusa right wearing diadem, earring and necklace, four dolphins and ΣΥRAKOΣ-I-O-N around.

Bibliography: E. Boehringer, *Die Muenzen von Syrakus* (Berlin, 1929), no. 474 (V 254/ R 340).

The two coins above are from very similar dies by the hand of the same master engraver. The head of Arethusa is now in severe style with a broad face and heavy eyelids, lips, and chin. The effect is almost sculptural and exemplifies the finest high classical style of the mid-fifth century B.C.

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Very truly yours,

Jeffrey Spier
Manager, Ancient Coin Department

JS:bp

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Dear Valued Customer:

We are very pleased to be able to present to you an outstanding group of coins of major importance. The enclosed special catalogue pictures nine Ancient Greek silver coins of exceptional beauty and rarity. All were struck at the Greek settlements in Sicily during the fifth century B.C., the period which produced coins of the finest artistic workmanship. Included in this group are several true masterpieces, including the spectacular tetradrachms from Naxos, Leontini, and Catana, which represent the greatest achievements in numismatic art.

Many of these rarities have never before been offered for sale in the United States and may not be offered again for many

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